



RESEARCH PROGRAM ON
Climate Change,
Agriculture and
Food Security



Data Ownership and Authorship

March 2018



Stats4SD

This document was produced in collaboration with [Statistics for Sustainable Development](#) and is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#).

Introduction

This guide addresses questions such as why we need to have specific agreements about data ownership, who owns the project data, and who has the right to be named as an author.

'Data' in the context of Ownership

Throughout this guide we repeatedly use the term 'data'. By this we mean not only datasets, metadata, observational data, and statistical data, but also items such as reports, videos, images, maps and audio recordings.

Who 'owns' the data?

Ensuring that each project has clear rules regarding data ownership makes sure that the relevant people have access to the data, whether these are scientists at the analysis stage or the public in the long term. These 'up-front' rules circumnavigate potential data ownership issues such as: researchers leaving projects and taking the only copy of the data with them, or a student refusing to share the data until after they have published etc.

So, who 'owns' the project data:

- The project sponsors?
- The project leader?
- The institutions involved in the research?
- The individual researchers, the scientists, the fieldworkers?
- The project data manager or managers?
- The respondents who provided the data?
- The public?

In reality it is probably all of these.

At the outset of a project a 'data sharing agreement' or a 'memorandum of understanding' should be put in place. This document should clearly outline who 'owns' the data throughout the project process. This document should be shared amongst all project members and archived at the end of the project.

Principles of Data Ownership

An example data sharing document is included in this Data Management Pack; it is based on the following 'ownership' principles:

- That research 'data' belong to institutions not individuals as it is only institutions that are able to ensure long term security for data;
- 'Data' generated by collaborating institutions belong jointly to those institutions;
- 'Data' collected using public funds are public property. Everyone has a responsibility to ensure the maximum value is realised from them.

Rights and Responsibilities

A data ownership and sharing agreement should also cover the rights and responsibilities of the scientists with respect to project 'data', namely:

- Scientists generating research 'data' have a right to recognition for their work;
- Scientists generating research 'data' using public funds have a duty to use the 'data' for the purpose for which funding was provided and to publish the findings.

Intellectual property rights should be established in the contracts signed between the institutions.

In conclusion 'data' ownership and intellectual property should be managed in a way to balance the interests of individual scientists, their institutions, the donors and society as a whole.

Authorship

There are many benefits to being a published author, in particular being recognised for your contribution to an area of research and being able to list your publications on your CV. However, being listed as an author does mean you are responsible for the accuracy of results, facts and interpretations within your publication, which you may be required to defend once peers have had the opportunity to review it.

So, who has the right to be listed as an author?

1. Authors should make substantial contributions throughout the research process:
 - a. in the conception and design of the research, or
 - b. the analysis and interpretation of the data.
2. They should be involved in drafting the paper or critically reviewing it for intellectual content.
3. They should have approval of the final version prior to publication.

The table below summarises these conditions – to be an author you must fulfil each of these criteria.

Authorship Criteria (must fulfil all 3)		
1	2	3
Design OR Analysis OR Interpretation	Draft OR Critically Review the paper for intellectual content	Final approval prior to publication

Not including a project member as an author when he/she has been involved in each of these criteria denies them recognition for their work which they deserve due to their level of contribution.

Who does not have the right to be listed as an author?

A project member does not have the right to be an author if they were not included in the design, analysis or interpretation stage, did not draft or review the paper, and did not have approval of the final version. For example, project members only involved in the data collection are not entitled to be authors, neither are members who manage the project without being involved in the actual activities.

Being included as an author if you have not fulfilled the criteria in the table above is dishonest, and may result in you having to defend work in which you have had little involvement, and which may be incorrect.

If a student carries out the work of part of a project and this is published as a thesis, then only the student is entitled to be the author of the thesis which they have written. Any publications resulting from a student thesis can be co-authored by project members meeting the authorship criteria; being a student supervisor does not automatically result in authorship rights.

Editors

An editor must review, comment on, and approve the content of the whole paper. Editors are responsible for the content quality.

Simply making changes highlighted by others, or changing the presentation of a paper does constitute being an editor.

Acknowledgements

Those who have contributed to the research but not in such a way as to be considered authors or editors are often listed under an “Acknowledgements” section. This is an established way of giving credit and thanks to those who have, for example, organized and managed the data, collected the data, devised the study tools, funded the research, run analyses, etc.

Summary

The crucial points to take away from this guide are:

- A data ownership agreement for each project is essential – it protects the rights of everyone involved in the project from the respondents, through to the scientists, to the program funding the research; ensuring the data are used for the intended purposes and are available at the appropriate times to the appropriate people.
- Authoring papers has wonderful benefits, but also responsibilities. Ensure that you deserve the recognition associated with being an author and make sure that you are not excluding a member of the team who has contributed sufficiently to warrant authorship.

Associate Videos

Videos accompanying the original release of the CCAFS Data Management Support Pack in 2013 are available as a playlist on the Statistical Services Centre YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCs7EU95YMjHvNozJKCD92xQ/playlists>. These videos have not been updated since the original release but are mostly still relevant.

In particular the playlist includes a video on Data Ownership available from the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDQWTuAMKTQ&list=PLK5PktXR1tmNRaUPsFiYlyhg2lui0xgpj&index=5>